WORDSWORDS
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ART IN LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE IN ART

As an extension or uttering (outering) of all our senses at once, language has always been held to be man's richest art form...

Marshall McLuhan*

Language is our most direct and immediate vehicle of communication. Through language, states of mind, thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions assume a physical form. The message translated into words is either verbal (audible) or written (visual) depending on the medium through which it is transmitted. The medium may be a human voice, a printed or written word on paper, cardboard, photography, photocopy, neon light, film, television or video screen. Whether we are speaking with a person, reading a newspaper, looking at an advertisement, watching television or listening to the radio, we constantly use the range of media in which language is expressed. The message of each language is circumscribed by social, cultural, historical implications to a limited number of people who share the same system for decodification.

In the case of this exhibition, "Words," the language is English, and its message will be understood by those to whom English is familiar. But even within this group of people sharing the same language, the response to the same message may be different. The understanding of it varies according to a person's previous experiences. For example, the word "table," beyond the common concept of table as a flat surface on four legs, may have different physical connotations in relation to an individual's experience of the object-table. The medium through which the word is expressed (neon light, ink etc.) may emphasize its aesthetic qualities but these remain, however, irrelevant in respect to the understanding of the content. The use of language in art is nothing new in art history. Words, letters and phrases have been used in paintings throughout the centuries in various cultures. The prevalence of language in the last ten years as an artistic form is part of a more complex reductive process which started at the beginning of the XX century when artists began to emphasize the mental aspect of the art-making process. While the aesthetic implications of appearances were never totally transcended, an understanding of the functional quality of things became an essential aspect of the intelligibility of art. The famous instance of Marcel Duchamp exhibiting in 1913 the front wheel of a bicycle mounted upside down on a stool was a major step in broadening the visual and intellectual constraints on art. By combining his vision of an object with the viewer's knowledge of its usual function, the artist confronts the observer with a new situation, one that engenders a variety of emotional and cognitive responses. The object and the idea exist in conflict, giving rise to an aesthetic tension. Perception becomes secondary to conception.

* Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1966).

The research is open to a wider field of investigation in which the aesthetic and philosophical content of art is analyzed and more specifically its meaning and its function in our society. For this aim many of the structures of language are used, as well as the implications of philosophical, scientific, mathematical, political and social thought. "Words" gathers many radically different artists under the common denominator of their use of language. The exhibition's purpose is to focus and specify the interest and the expansion of language in all these directions through the use of different media, from the analytic attitude of conceptual art to the narrative and fluid tone of post-conceptual works.

It is an expressive vocabulary through which artists are exploring new interactions of visual and conceptual thought. There is a different attitude toward art and a new tension between the artist and his work which then is reflected on the audience. The viewer is asked to participate on a variety of perceptual and cognitive levels when experiencing a work that includes language as a primary element. A more conscious level of participation is implied when a viewer must read a portion of a work of art. It creates the possibility for a more direct communication between the artist and the public and gives the viewer the opportunity to consider language in a wider perspective.

CATALOGUE

VITO ACCONCI
False Center For LA (Or The New York Address), 1976
Mixed media
Construction and audiotape
Lent by the artist

LAURIE ANDERSON
Art and Illusion, Film Song 24/24 Time, 1977
Photograph, ink and audiotape, 30"x24½"
Courtesy of Holly Solomon Gallery

ELEANOR ANTIN
See video schedule

SHUSAKA ARAKAWA
And-Or in Profile, 1975
Silkscreen 31"x42"
Courtesy of Multiples Inc.

JOHN BALDESSARI
Three TV Sentences, 1976/77
Photograph and ink on paper, three panels, 17"x11"
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery

ROBERT BARRY
Celebrate, 1977
Audiotape (spoken by Janelle Reiring), 100 minutes
Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery

BILL BECKLEY
Snake, 1974
Photograph and text, 35½"x17¼"
Courtesy of John Gibson Gallery

VICTOR BURGIN
Still in The Dark, 1976
Photographic print on alluminum
Courtesy of John Weber Gallery

IAN BURN
Mirror Piece, 1967
Mirror, 19"x12½", and 12 pages, 8½"x 11"
Private collection, New York

RONALD CLARK
see video schedule

DOUGLAS DAVIS
Burying Camera II, 1974
Silkscreen, 26" x 38"
Lent by the artist

NORMA JEAN DEAK (with Massimo Mostacchi)
Performance: Passe' Simple
Thursday, March 24, 12:30- 1:30

WALTER DeMARIA
Mind, 1968
Sculpture, stainless steel, 1"x4"x24"
Lent by the artist, Courtesy of Heiner Friederich Inc.

JOEL FISHER
Apograph Alphabet # 41, 1972-76
Handmade paper and ink, 26 letters 6½"x6½"
Courtesy of Max Protetch Gallery

HOLLIS FRAMPTON
See Film schedule

HANS HAAKE
The Road to Culture is Paved with Profit, 1976
Text on Plexiglass 52½"x42½"
Courtesy of John Weber Gallery

DOUGLAS HUEBLER
Providing that it has intersected no more than three other lines on route every line represented above is designed to extend from either , or both ends unitll terminating at point "z". 1972
Letraset and silkscreen on paper 48" x 36"
Courtesy of Sperone Westwater Fischer Inc.

PETER HUTCHINSON
'R' from the Alphabet Series, 1974
Rubber, photograph on text, 40"x30"
Courtesy of John Gibson Gallery

POPPY JOHNSON
Untitled Performance
Wednesday , March 16 thru Friday, March 18, 12:30-2:30 PM

ALLAN KAPROW
see video schedule

LEANDRO KATZ
Text for the Base, 1973
Ink on paper
Lent by the artist

ON KAWARA
August 11 1975; August 12 1975 , 1975
Liquitex on canvas, 10"x13"
Courtesy of Sperone Westwater Fischer Inc.

NANCY KITCHEL
How Do Men Turn into Dogs?, 1976
Book, 8½"x11"
Courtesy of M.L. D'Arc Gallery

JOSEPH KOSUTH
One and Eight-A Description, 1965
Neon light
Courtesy of Sperone Westwater Fischer Inc.

LES LEVINE
Message Unit from the Game Room, Attribute to the Great American Loser, 1976
Metal box, fluorescent tube, 6"x30"x6"
Courtesy of M.L. D'Arc Gallery

see also video schedule

ROBERT MORRIS
Telegram:'Re-do the Chicago Fire 1871', 1968
Telegram, 13½"x16½"
Private collection, New York

GIFFORD MYERS
Rope Trick, 1977
Hemp
Collection of Mr. and Mrs Gillen

BRUCE NAUMAN
Run from Fear Fun from Rear, 1972
Neon light
Courtesy of Sperone Westwater Fischer Inc.

DENNIS OPPENHEIM
see viedo schedule

FRANK OWEN
ATRIMFOROURTIME, 1974
Adhesive paper
Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery

LUCIO POZZI
Nothing Today (from the Cominform), 1976
Grafite on museum board, 52"x22"
Lent by the artist

EDWARD RUSCHA
Colorfast?, 1975
Three pieces: beet juice on paper, onionstalk on paper, gun powder on paper, 7"x29"
Courtesy of Leo Castelli Gallery

PAUL SHARITS
see film schedule

DAVID SHULMAN
see film schedule

MICHAEL SNOW
see film schedule

BEN VAUTIER
What bothers me in this writing is its esthetic side, 1971
Acrylic on canvas, 28½"x36"
Courtesy of John Gibson Gallery

BERNAR VENET
Frequency Redistribution of Scattering, 1967-68
Text on graph paper, 59½"x86½"
Collection of the artist

WILLIAM WEGMAN
Four drawings: Always Tell the Truth, 1975, pencil on paper
Do not, don't, 1975 pencil on paper
Have a heart, Be a ....., 1975, ink on paper
University Architecture, 1973, pencil on paper
Courtesy of Sonnabend Gallery

LAWRENCE WEINER
Having a relation to progress(of a sort): left here put there for a limited time
Offset, 8½"x11¼"
Courtesy of Leo Castelli

GARY WEIS
Mailings, 1974-75-76
Three Photostats, 11"x14"
Lent by the artist

see also film schedule

ROGER WELCH
Untitled, 1972
Photograph and text on cardboard, 30"x20"
Lent by the artist

IAN WILSON
Untitled, 1977
Ink on paper, 8½"x11¼"
Lent by the artist

VIDEO SCHEDULE

LES LEVINE
Selling of a Video Artist, 1976
If I Graduate, 1977
Courtesy of Anna Canepa Video Distribution

DENNIS OPPENHEIM
Spinning a Yarn, 1975
Courtesy of Anna Canepa Video Distribution

ELEANOR ANTIN
The Adventures of a Nurse, part II, 1976
Courtesy of Anna Canepa Video Distribution

ALLAN KAPROW
Seven Kinds of Sympathy, 1976
Courtesy of Anna Canepa Video Distribution

RONALD CLARK
Doubt, 1976
Lent by the artist

PERFORMANCES

NORMA JEAN DEAK
see list of artists

POPPY JOHNSON
see list of artists

FILM SCHEDULE Tuesday 1:00-2:00 PM Friday 12:00-1:00 PM

HOLLIS FRAMPTON
Poetic Justice, 1972
31 minutes
Distributed by Film-Makers Cooperative

PAUL SHARITS
Touching, 1968
10 minutes
Distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Video and Film Distribution
Influential Current, 1971
12 minutes
Distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Video and Film Distribution

DAVID SHULMAN
(A Premonitory...), 1972
2 minutes
Break 2 minutes
SPECIOUS PRESENT, 1975
1 minute
Break 2 minutes
(A.....B), 1973
2 minutes
Break 2 minutes
(A Current...), 1973
10 minutes
Distributed by Castelli-Sonnabend Video and Film Distribution

MICHAEL SNOW
Standard Time, 1967
8 minutes
Lent by the artist

GARY WEIS
Taylor and His Cat, 1975
3 minutes
Lent by the artist
Funniest Man in Town, 1975
2½ minutes
Lent by the artist
Practical Joke, 1975
3 minutes
Lent by the artist

This exhibition has been organized by the following Helena Rubinstein Fellows in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program: Isabella Puliafito, SUNY at Binghamton and Universita di Parma and Martha Winans, University of California-Irvine, with the assistance of William Ameringer, Pennsylvania State University. Other Helena Rubinstein Fellows responsible for the operations of the Downtown Branch Museum this semester are: Mary Wayne Fritzsche, Smith College; Connie Grunwald, Florida State University; Lauren McGuinn, University of Manchester, England; Gina McKay, University of North Carolina; Mary Mullin, University of North Carolina; Stephen Polcari, University of California, Santa Barbara and Joan Rubin, New York University. The Downtown Branch Museum is under the direction of David Hupert, Head of the Whitney Museum's Education Department.

The Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art, located in the Uris Building at 55 Water Street, is supported by the business community of lower Manhattan. The Independent Study Program is supported by the Helena Rubinstein Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. The museum is open Monday through Friday 11-3. Admission is free.